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A Lady of Unbuttoned Principals

Curtis Zahn

Winter's sallow moon fell whitely across the feverish sky. Below, in the city, everything was a pulsating pencil of borrowed illumination, ricocheting against the chrome helmets of soldiers in the fort, and lending madness to the mist around lamp posts. And on the rooftops these grey rays dipped low and cold like the cries of charred coyotes on an expanse of purified desert. There was a dance of east wind against the phallic spars of yachts on the bay; wisps of fog publicly wetted against eerie neon signs, and a soldier's dog, tired and demoralized, sat erect upon the cold nose of a concrete sidewalk, pondering the take-home qualities of a nighttime lady. Often, during this flat,wilted civic waiting there were heard screams; the delighted screams of passengers aboard the roller coaster in the amusement park, voices in great fidelity. And the alerted ear was able to detect the grating sounds of cable-cars as they softly crunched out discarded cigarettes on their lonely, impossible journeys up steep hills.

In her second story flat, the lady; fingering her buttons, the lady on "F" Street; the buttons on her bulging blouse. And she asked herself, "Who knows the underlying principles that inhibit the economics of the Shark?"The words were ripples, the sentence a small subterranean murmur among the tides.They were her words, spoken with the unlawful dignity of the insane. And because she sat alone, her thighs lost in the foam-rubber amplitude of a contour chair, she waited for no answer.

"The soft underbelly of the shark; a thing of the moon; the faithful reflection from white, sandy bottoms." It was a meditation at which she gnawed away worryingly at nights, alone and serene, seated under a floor lamp which had never been lit, a lamp with its shade still wrapped in cellophane. Beside this window, a story up from concrete and cars and brick streets; a window chosen as her alert eye upon the world glaring back at the sun's refraction on the bay, a window awarded a

street light by darkness, a man-moon around which milled moths and bats in a frenzied merry go round of life and death. From the mist her face was wise, beautiful, disturbing; an owl passing the window would know that an inner-self held the structure together, illuminated it with amoral love. Here dwelt a woman who could be dropped by parachute into the heart of Africa, or even Los Angeles, and emerge unscarred; a creature always to be separated from the earth by cushioned automobile tires, or airliners or yachts; a thing of charm whose feathers would be given her, whose skin would be covered by mink or ermine; a goddess for cats or for soldier's dogs. The clashes of cacophonous life must die away before she would consent to speak; a feather must crash to earth before she would stand before the populace, a depthless, curved, gracious entity. Army officers were to salute intelligently; enlisted men's whistles died to a hushed whisper. Traffic cops would become beaming, kindly, fatherly old men, and young swains in hot rods would fall asleep at the wheel until she had passed, and steamships would hurry into port and be reluctant to sail so long as her presence by the window held the populace spellbound.

There existed an odd relationship between the owl and the lady by the window in the flat on "F" Street. On mild summer evenings the bird had clung to the electric light pole wires, hungry and waiting and watching, yet powerless to leave the scene as she toyed spiritually with the buttons of her blouse. Often, the bird's huge amber eyes widened and narrowed, its head darted in an agony of worship, its expression hung frozen and quizzical as it saw past its own reflection in the misty glass; saw its reflection superimposed upon the bosom and face of the woman. Long ago, it had ceased to function as a predator. It now swooped for bread crusts and lettuce in alley garbage pails. Mice upped audaciously to the huge bird, and crickets under the grey, fey moon would inch up to its tightly locked talons and chirp dismally while the foundered bird stared into the window.

"Beat it!" she said one night. She smiled through tight, white teeth, her eyes wise with a bird lover's intelligence.

"I've gone straight! I've come clean! I am destructive only as the vegetarian horse! "These were not the owl's words, for the lady had undertaken to write dialogue for the bird on those occasions when she toyed, sometimes desperately, with her taut buttons.

Impassively the owl meditated the script. A newer, cleaner moon swung through stationary clouds and its misty light fell upon the

white gravel roofs of the Portuguese fishing section, and the pearl colored Jaguar convertible parked across the street appeared blacker than ever. In the apartment above the vehicle a shadestring swung indolently at halfmast, a string with the ring still attached, and the lady noted serenely that it was an extreamely new shade, and just under it, the decapitated body of a fisherman. The buttons on his jacket were brass, and his great gnarled hands did not play at buttoning.

"He declines to reveal his head," she thought, "he cowers behind the shade, a shade of a dark green shade. The owl's not afraid to show his face." And, still with the wise smile of one who knew shades with the wisdom of women—as one who wrote continuity for owsl—she deliberately unbottoned a button. The owl commenced its bobbing and weaving, its eyes enlarging and narrowing and enlarging. She knew now that the bird would be incapacle of laying eggs. "Even owls," she told herself religiously, "even owls—"

"Who knows what underlying economics inhibit an owl."

The words, recklessly tried on for color sounded remarkably tailored. It was as though one habitually went around with a privately invented phrase, seeking a deserving ear, and now, at last—

"It is an economy of dog eat dog," the owl said.

"I have yet to see this. Do you assert that the soldier's dog on the street corner is a cannibal? Do you assert that this lovebound beast with its haunted gift—"

"Dogs eat cats eat owls eat birds eat insects."

It was a captivating line. The great bird seemed tired for the saying of it, but now he added, "Mice come to me for their deaths. They grow bored, careless, accident-prone. They come to me for the experience of a possible after-life."

The owl was asking her to kill him then. He was apparently desperate with the knowledge that humans had an intangible something; the hot, taut presence of reason, the ability to kill when not hungry; reason capable of entering vehicles and pushing buttons, and if the buttons failed, reasoning that another human with another reasoning might make them work. To the owl she was a creature able to run over turtles and squirrels on highways that were reasoned by other reasoners. She was able to run over them without a reason, whereas the owl had to be hungry. "I am a composite, a complete part of time and evolution; a whole sense of the animal, of all animals, and because I am all animals I therefore rule all animals." These words she wrote

on a small notebook which rested between her thighs, and the long, rounded fingers fell from the buttons, eager in their new work.

October's moon was chased lovingly across a sky by billions of sighing, crying stars. The night rode in with hooded innuendo one late afternoon and began to hang around. The fog wept. Fishing boats nuzzled their wharfs, and the soldiers at the Presidio played a good deal of poker while television programs screamed and murdered and laughed in each barracks, and a high ranking officer ordered the dog to be given a mercy killing.

However, the dog had lately taken to watching a cat which watched the owl which watched the lady who toyed with the buttons of her blouse; and because the beast seldom came into the barracks to be violently and affectionately patted, the order was forgotten. Under the moon, the Jaguar convertible rode its lonely moorings night by night while rivulets roared past its tires bearing cargoes of Kleenex and cigarette butts newly crunched by cable cars. The fisherman lowered his shade across the street so that now, on an evening, only the buttons on his trousers were visible. It was then that the owl started to construct the nest.

At first with small sticks gathered around the embaracadero, and later with confetti from the streets of the New Year's morning, the somber bird toiled. Entering the partly open window of the Jaguar sports coupe, he airlifted the quantities of mass, arranging them counter-clockwise and mysteriously in the tonneau over the rear seat. On Sundays, which were the only hours the car was used, he roosted, brooding and disconsolate in the crumbling rafters of the fine arts building, dolefully watching the passage of pigeons, popcorn and people below him, while the fisherman, in a blue serge suit drove ponderously across the street to call on the lady who continued to fondle her buttons. Inevitably the procedure followed a pattern not peculiar to the culture; swinging in a half circle on the narrow street, the Jaguar came to a rest ere it had barely started, at the opposite curbing. The compact, mighty engine idled for a moment, then stopped. The fisherman, in blueblack and a necktie to match, alighted, crossed the sidewalk and rang the bell. He waited, then rang again. He rang a third time. Then, after a reverent wait of a full minute, he turned, strode back to the car, pressed the starter and, banking the wheel abruptly, swung in an arc back to his own parking place. Again the motors idled, again they stopped, again he alighted. But here, instead

of ringing a bell he produced a key and permitted himself to enter his own residence.

The owl had come to know the length of time required for the procedure. With a last restless glance at the pigeons below, and with an expression of tolerant contempt for the pond ducks grown too prosperous to ever again be airborne, it executed a magnificent swoop, literally breaking the sound barrier as it plummeted earthward, banked, climbed violently up and then glided straight to the parked vehicle, entering the open window at precisely the same moment the fisherman was entering his apartment. There it would roost until nightfall; dormant, wise, detached, sleeping a death of deathly sleep.

As winter wounded the nightfall with its odd, cold, the street lamps magically glowed earlier by the clock. Noting this, the owl, despite its cramped hindquarters, began to generate a disbelief in some of the conveniences maintained by the creatures he had previously credited with astounding reasoning powers. For he noted that when first he started nesting in the convertible, the dials glowed six o'clock sharp whenever the comfortable, comforting blackness stole in with its gloved, throttling, muffling, friendly power. And now, as his feathers grew into warm freight, the dial would point at four-forty-eight.

Then, one night, in a drifting rain, he noted that the clock behind the lady with the buttons had itself forgotten how to tell time. He ejaculated a hoot into the walls of water, even as he remembered that the creatures of reason, were they clutching the wet cold wires of the telephone pole, would have employed reasonable raincoats as a reasonable protection against the reasonable rainfall.

"Beat it!" the lady said. It was the first time she had spoken to him in months. The smile retained its luminous, hooded mystery. It was as wise as sex, illustrated with teeth which knew nests and could, if commanded, scissor mice into fragments.

"Thought you might like to know," he remarked soberly, "your clock's off its rocker."

She was creating dialogue for him again, putting wisdom into his mouth, throwing him clever, pocketsized intelligences. "Also—your doorbell don't work."

"No." Her smile wrung actual rain from his feathers. Her fingers crawled immorally up her blouse, negotiated the almost insurrmountable overhang of breast and crept onward. Then ,pausing for a rest,

they commenced to work giftedly upon the topmost button. "You need a woman—"

"A woman? Reason me about women."

"Somebody to return your gaze on forlorn nights when soldiers lean against lamp posts and sell themselves."

"It is an odd world then." He saw the button fall away from its yardage. He saw the fingers move spiderlike towards the lower one. "I was grounded during the war. Nighttime reconnaisance over enemy territory. Tail shot away." Neither of them listened for the words he wasn't saying.

Her hand trembled but the smile held magnificently. Now the second button fell; the fabric sagged and he saw the warm soft rise and fall of flesh and thought coldly of his unreasonable nest of sticks in the rear of the automobile and he added, "took a job as dishwasher in Pakistan. Any old thing to keep busy—we knew that wars ended wars in those days. Later a tragic affair with a mouse. Siamese cat, December, forty-six. Her husband was my best friend."

"I know." her mouth quivered. "I've had horses."

Angrily, he flew away.

The days moved softly towards night. Hours were stolen from their quiet murmur in a bold economy step, and mushrooms appeared in the park among the cold pigeons, and a potted cactus in the window of the key shop on "F" Street began to shiver and shrivel. And because of the cold and the rain, the Portuguese fisherman was landlocked; his nets vacationed in a waterfront warehouse, and the mackerel had dived deeply, and one blustery morning he began to worry about his Jaguar convertible, alone and frightened in the wild weather. He wished more than anything to carry it into his room and dry it by the fire and administer to it there until the soft, hushed green of the spring. He considered the possibility that they might live together in a garage, just they two, sharing the roof, laughing at rain. And at night, while the wind gnawed and worried against the rafters, he would make love to the chrome and leather. He would caress the sparkplugs, he would work olive oil into the moving parts. It was then, in the dancing wetness of daylight, he discovered the nest in the rear of the convertible.

"Sacramento! Christo Columbo!" he roared.

The owl, blind at a time when humans see—faced by a situation when the lady with the buttons was unable to supply him with dialogue

—sulked in stoic terror. The fisherman seized the sticks and twigs of the nest and began throwing them onto the wet sidewalk, announcing the sheer horror of each offense with the names of saints. In clumsy lunges the great bird endeavored to flee the vehicle, thudding against glass, thumping the mute fabric of the top and finally clinging desperately to the steering wheel where, suddenly, its powerful talons closed periodically upon the horn button, liberating unnerving blasts which caused the fisherman to start cursing in English while faces up and down the neighborhood street peered wonderingly through their streaked windows. The fisherman, now armed with the largest twig available, pried the paralyzed bird from its perch. There was another thud. Wings beat against the rear window. Then in a swoop, the bird had struck the windshield, slid down the cowl, its talons grasping desperately. And now the unbelievable worst had happened, for,somehow, in the haphazard mystic manner which sometimes protects the dumb, the bird had gripped the knob which automatically lowers the top. While its wings beat senselessly, while the fisherman roared in new agony, the top began maddeningly to fold down, allowing the rain to pour inside.....

The lady with the buttons on her blouse had moved her sensitive, restless fingers to the knob on the new tableside radio as she watched it all through the streaming window, a saintly smile on her face. She had heard the word, "Sacramento!" and turned her attention to the scene, for she had lived in Sacramento at a time before horses, and the word stirred her curiously. She had seen the sticks and twigs fly from the car, had watched them float down the gutter and hoped, somehow, they would make it back to the sea, and all through these events, even during the height of the horns blasting, she had retained the smile. The smile—haughty, alive, alert, warm—even as Harry James' trumpet was drowned from the radio by her side. And now the crazy fisherman was lowering his top in the blinding rain and she loved him for it and wondered why he never came to call.

"But no! It is the owl!" Her voice was worn velvet, an information for the eyes that had seen; for the mad, catapulting thing that had heaved from the convertible was the owl, a bird not crazy enough to ride motorcars in the rain, nor yet choose a fisherman for platonic purposes. "I cannot permit him now," she acknowledged, "it would seem too propitious, too charitable, and for charity I would not be doing it—"

As the chlorophyll months began to come in, the buttons upon frayed blouses began to tremble as an anticipation of times when garments were hurriedly shed, or hurriedly donned. Dormant perspective stretched and yawned and exclaimed the new night. The moths again swam in the fetid air around street lamps; the mice prepared to outnumber their antagonizors; animals chased each other for the love of it, and the lady by the window on "F" Street knew that this was to be her spring, her year. Instinctively her fingers flew to her blouse when cats trumpeted on rooftops; her hands were warm spiders that darted over soft mounds when her eyes calculated the statistical movements as pigeons marched mechanically after pigeons.

The owl had proven adamant throughout the winter, had clung to his wire with talons newly like fingers, economically grasping only things that were not alive. On June twenty-first the hot moon froze him in silhouette; he looked larger than Halloween itself and, for the first time, she noticed how the feathers on his head curved out to form a pair of horns.

"A devil with the women?" she asked. The question was green hay watching the plow.

"Wise as is the snake." But he pronounced the word oddly, as though it were spelled S-N-A-Q-U-E.

"Women wonder about snakes."

"The old legend. The square peg. The round hole."

But, she knew, snakes are not square.

From the waterfront they heard an old Benny Goodman record played miserably on the portable phonograph aboard some sardine boat. The moon had discovered a television antenna, silvery in the evening, and it made contact, and the effect was weird and fine.

"The buttons," he said, "you're forgetting your buttons."

"Yes. The buttons." Her practiced fingers moved gracefully past the overhangs and the bird's talons opened and closed on the wire, shredding the insulation.

"The buttons," he chanted urgently, "oh, the buttons—"

A steamship whistled; shrill, strident, impudent.

"The buttons! Quickly, the buttons!"

Her fingers suddenly ceased their feverish movements and became sensuous, slow, reluctant. The upper part of the fabric hung by a thread. The owl surged wildly on the swinging wire.

"Now!" he hissed, "now!" and the lady, still serene and smiling

noticed that sparks jumped from the shredded wire.

"Yes! Now." Her finger moved. Then an explosion rocked the neighborhood. When the owl regained his balance he realized that the topmost button had fallen to the floor. There followed four more explosions. The smoldering wire parted and the great bird, now airborne, climbed high, circled, and on a dead stick, with wings spread, and talons outstretched, commenced a long glide toward the windowless room in the upperflat on "F" Street, where the lady with the inward smile sat by the unlighted lamp.

Three Rather Obvious Images from the Penultimate Morning

Carl Larson

1

so sorry joe
youll never get to kill us all
hope and evolution to the end
unfortunately tomorrow evening

hate to abuse your
omni(m)potent self
but the way it went
that penultimate morning
was nothing like youd ever
even sketch

there was myself
and one woman
and we smiled together
and she sat down
relaxing reclining saying
"take my hand,
et cetera,"

2

the men and women
hearts popping from their heads
garish cartoon images
of nothing sacred
found just enough time
to say a prayer
to the last machine
a stillbirth unfortunately
before the screaming
abruptly began
and ended a second before

science would have leaped ahead
a century or so
at that most interesting moment
if someone had remembered
to bring a chronometer

blue as a frozen hand
the red faced sun
crept up
not knowing exactly what to say
at a next to farewell appearance

the men and the women
and myself and one woman
looked and said
"oh nice, eh?"

then watched a gull
trudging out to sea
until it fell

Not Us We Love the Dirty "..."s

Carl Larson

say buddy
think it would make much difference if i steal a penny
from a blind man?
or what the hell if i kick a cripple
in the street
sure why we ain't lame or sightless
besides
we love the dirty "..."s

pastels in smoke and liquid

Carl Larson

her face
empty as a jewelry box
coughs up her smile

the face
she thought she had one time
is lined in neon paint

and says the smile too much
along the bar

The Big Hoop-Hoop at 38th Street

Carl Larson

It started in that flat on 38th street, in the tenement-small-room, third level up, front, where all those crazy fellows lived together and did god knows what.

It started late that afternoon and got noisy and the police came and stayed, so there was one worry taken care of but why worry.

It started with a tide of breaking sound.

—hello hello hello hello hello

—well...hello adonais, thought you were dead

—why this isn't a counterfeit party at all...you know all those abstract fellows are always hooting about it (an attempt at humor) I really believe they are enjoying themselves clear through, arent they ...ARENT THEY

—what oh yes of course they are everyone lovely just lovely

—look at that fellow over there cutting his wrist and dripping it on the green rug and screaming merry christmas

Adonais in the middle of a drink of good red wine found himself unable to answer the stare of the queer horn-headed critic that drank chablis from a miniature urinal and spat alternate mouthfuls at some terrible person (his alter ego he insisted) at his side. Adonais found it more suitable and relaxing to smile and just say nothing to anyone who hadn't already.

There was a fine fine mood to a thing like that that started naturally. Everyone agreed the mood was the thing. And in the four room two chair three bedroom flat, mood moved from cigarette to cigarette as easily as things being consumed, wet tongues, eager things like thought and phony things affectations flown from mind but perfectly remembered by reflex.

Lots of others came; people wandering in the streets, people always and always looking for something, and meeting themselves face to

face on the stairs and not even being startled but just moving on like such a terrible thing never could happen to them or anyone, people who picked up discarded bodies and wore them to the big hoop hoop.

Bill stood in what was probably the exact center of the flat that moved around with sort of abstract walls reading a manuscript. —it's crazy...it sounds like it was written by a depraved madman, a molester of children.

—i find i think unpleasantly of people who sit in motion picture theaters and repeat lines. They always laugh afterwards. This is a terribly repetitive world.

—isnt she gorgeous?

—many of them do this also when telling of some strange and tragic beautiful and original, completely interesting experience they have had (explained to them by a friend.)

—it's nerve wracking

—arent we all after all as trite and archaic as bees?

—Bea has the oldest largest most well traveled and most used one in history she claims

—she says her name is Beatrice but i dont believe her

The Virgin Polyethylene came in and the two men standing talking (looking nervously like two burlesque comediens from a dead era) nudged each other and stared at her.

—hasn't she got a low-swinging ass?

—(why is my ass put so low?)

PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

The Virgin Polyethylene was pregnant as the two men came up to her and said in unison—

—we are hungry, arent you going to foetus?

hahahaha they went hahahaha

—hello friend

—hello what are you eating

—chocolate bile

The man who killed god came in, had a few drinks, passed out a pamphlet of his own thought and reputation, then sold his robe, his sandals, even his crown of thorns to souvenir hunters from uptown.

A purple kind of a haze came across it all and it seemed fantastically small, too small a flat to hold all of them and still they came, their

heads in their outstretched palms. and nobody left. nobody ever left. Adonais thought it would be a little known breed of hysteria before it ended.

—i cannot find him i cannot find him i should lookinthebedroom i suppose anyone i know or anyone smoking a cigar is probably off some where in one of the bedrooms and i cant understand why they dont get tired they do it all the time everyone does everything all the time.

—familiarity breeds.

—thinking of something new has even been tried before but that is terrible they dont know they dont know.

—i'm not going to speak to you

—why not i'm a very nice person you should know me.

—personification of an inanimate object is strictly forbidden.

—you cant tell me anyone anywhere really likes the taste of liquor no one will admit it though. a drink to be sociable. hell. everyone looking for effects. or ahhhhfects like they say or maybe both.

—well i know i drink to get drunk hurrah for me

—but why you think

—its fun

The two comedians perched on the edge of the bed where the Virgin and Adonais were controtting and being sociable (without spilling a drop) and singing in harmony—

went down to the london docks
to board the good ship venus
her figurehead was a whore in bed
her mast was an upright—

—say honey arent you new

—who you kidding mac i been here since it started

—i got in an hour ago what time did it begin?

—ninteen forty seven

Let's have a big hoop hoop of a time with babes who will and a jug in every arm. The thought rolled over the place like a rotten thing would seem to. filling cracks and open doors like the talk like the people up above banging on the pipes and finally coming down to get in on the fun; everyone knows theres nothing like fun.

It got sad. No one left but no one else was coming in. Damn sad. And another thought became, and it was that maybe it was going to have an ending after all.

– whats wrong you look sad
– its plugged hows yours
– i was hurt in the war
--who knows who knows who knows
--by then we'll all be wearing clothes.

It ended when it became a national pastime. It ended when there was no one left around outside.
It ended when every possible combination of sight sound emotion smell and thought had thoroughly been explored except one.
Nobody's perfect.

A Little Parable of Gods and Men

David Galler

In Phaeacia, naked, the murderous isles behind,
And a sun-bright sky without the lightning-wrath,
Odysseus sprawls face-downward in the sand
And wonders who will bring the next reprise.
And sleeps. And wakes to find this world nowise
Has changed: no swinestress wields a bitter wand;
No almond voices wash in the breeze. The sand
Boasts only a scorpion, which tracks its knives
In stubborn parody of will, and meets
Each coming mountain stolid as the last—
A puppet before barriers the Greek contrives.
Odysseus studies this warrior's fated field
And shudders lest man's involvement come to that.
And would guide the pawn to shade, but for its wiles.

The Lady in the Window

David Galler

Drawn to the window of our life, Persephone,
It may be that the chill of summer's perfect day
(which you will know chiefly) shall guide your gaze
To the child fleeing the meadow, or the lady
Accomplishing her combs in some closet, whose
Transom allows a light suitable for learning
The infractions of time upon dedicate burning;
It may be you will dream ways by which we lose.

Dry wind follows spring in the heart bewildered,
Dazzled by colors, in a field too wild with flowers;
In a room where the hostile rose obliquely answers
Unasked questions. The skull rides masked in remembered
Passion, pale, deceived; rides between sudden
Carrion summer and winter-memory's vultures.

Sisyphus

David Galler

Another myth, deep-rooted in the realm of stone,
Of which no miraculous love came of the effort,
Or sacrifice to escape Time, as shown
In the Moon's legends of various lovers—
This king learned the complicities of failure.

Confounding gods as readily as relatives,
Yet showing astute care to consult oracles,
Sisyphus, though he reviled superlatives,
Acceded still to the chance value of miracles.
He bowed low in the light of the repetitive.

Doubt was his wild affliction. Doubt his sustainer.
Rage, sorrow, the petulant multiple emotions,
The rationalizations, in the harsh light of the boulder,
These cast hope. These colored ritual submission.
None save doubt bred panic for his savage humor.

Two Poems of the Way

Paul Goodman

1

Passing along the wharves
purposive and surefooted
silent, on soft shoes
(better invisible too)
a seeking or avenging
ghost, a restless unfinished
spirit of the Noh
maniacally still seeking
on faces alive in this world
ideal shapes of heaven,
vengefully to wrest
my stolen inheritance back—
To in that instant shed
these rags of nakedness!
tags of pedestrian speech!
and put the great robe on
a green and silver robe on,
dancer of this Island
and the Rivers bordering!
Question me, I am he;
please to undo the spell.

2

The sparse-haired bleeding crown of a man
in the dirty river by the wharf
I saw, I shouted for help,
climbed down in the mire and pulled him onto a ledge.
His back was hurt, I lit a cigarette
and put it in his mouth.
The ambulance and two tan orderlies
appeared above, I went away.

This same old man I met again this morning
reeling at the edge with his bottle,
muscatel, under his coat.
The veil o' the world is lying in a discarded
heap anywhere;
a dog is curiously sniffing in odd corners at
these rags.
But I have lost touch with the whereabouts of That.
Is it that My Only World is naked and I am ashamed?

The Emblem

PAUL GOODMAN

If a life must be lost, let it be the rescuer's,
for that has a meaning, is an emblem;
therefore, since all must be lost, be a rescuer.

You may imprint a meaning on the underlying fact
or make an emblem of the underlying fact.

Martyrs who signed their deaths as witnesses
and the Faithful who chose to die in battle as defenders
of the faith,
these imprinted a meaning on the underlying fact.

The northern warriors chose just to die in a battle
and this was glorying in the underlying fact,
but we cannot say that this was meaningful.

The underlying fact is that they all are dying,
the Emblem is Buddha the compassionate.

Warriors merge and drown in the sickening maws of the sea;
seers and physicians are alert lifeguards on the shore
—on the shore that itself is being eaten away.

Warriors as they drown in death shout "Victory!"
A lifeguard, when he rescues some one, curses.

A Dream

Paul Goodman

I dreamt that the face of the President's wife
was tattooed on my forearm, my ideal
and military service; I awoke
to this fool and his drunkard, these baboon
sailors waging an ignorant war,
my nerveless hands and the tears streaming down
my cheeks.
I would not be a coward if I wore,
Lady, (if I knew), your colors proud.

A Good Month

Paul Goodman

We had a few moments of quiet beauty,
in our dark room lit by a lamp thru the trees.
They were not in the reliable order of events
nor in the practical order of what I know to do.
I did not know what to do with this
closer than fears, closer than needless cares,
too close, inside arm's length, to ward off,
only to murmur "Stay! last long!" but soon
I grew anxious in these unbearable
pauses sweet in which I could not stay
and lapsed into lust to orgasm and sleep.

Those beautiful moments we deserved, for we
tried hard with both daring and forebearance
to preserve the possible into a fact,
gave what we had, and almost we accepted
advantages that were available,
yes! and honor and good judgment guarded us
like angels, we were proud of being lucky.

Even while I lay there at a loss
how to cope with this closer than opportunity,
growing panicky also because o' the waste,
I thought: "It will recur in memory!
This will recur in memory and feed me
and I shall pasture my soul then on it."
Thinking like one long starved by my only world,
and so I am, alive to the sin of waste,
"Hereby I shall be nourished at my need
by your face is shining more than the dim light
because of attentiveness, and we talk sweet-talk
that has style, exchanging compliments
meticulously true, without demur."

But now these things have left me as I am.
As I did not know what to do with that,
I cannot find myself in the world as it is.
I am distraught with longing for paradise,
convinced it is unattainable for me.

Poem

STUART Z. PERKOFF

There will come a day
(poets will build this custom)
a day will come
with changes.
We cannot even consider them
without being thought mad.

Our caution
in disguising them as artistic
fools no one.
(Every rose pollinates/
even the stupidest know this)
No matter how beautiful
in the center of our roses
is the stink of another thing.

poem for iconoclasts

MAES M. SINGER

....Infidelity does not consist
in believing, or disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe......Thom Paine

men are dying some-where for nothing tonight when they could be
living for something
besides blood all over them drying brown/sticky
in gaza and budapest

a man asked a little boy
if he wanted to be a Christian
the little boy said no
he wanted to be
a Human Being

the man said
surely he wanted to be
a Christian
the little boy said
yes, Achristian

well, it has been two-thousand years you know
and the blood on our hands is still red dripping

the t ouble is
god doesn't know whose side he's on
and we're not going to tell him yet
and have him ruin this
gethappy society of automation

pushbuttons
steamshovels
billboards

keeping conservative
and undifferent with the un un ameri cana isms
of nothinking and being somewhere else nokilling
anywhere at all

death is always final: mur-der all ways com-plete
and it doesn't matter if it s by cudgel/starvation/hbomb
by law/literature/christian-
bickering to death

i say what we need is a
big/fat scept-i-versal
a-theism

and all this killing will cease
once and for all
by building the suez canal right thru
the artifactual church and let
the arabjew bodies
float to the pulpit bloated and smelling of war
and divine rights
i heard a joke:
about a guy who was burying his donkey
seems he was digging an ass hole

nicosia, cyprus—
british canberra jet bombers
today knocked out cairo s
propaganda radio, voice of arabia
and still the murder continues
there is nothing christian men will stop at
except suicide they commit more slowly
drowning in the havoc/blood of their filthy hands

if we grew tulips in the spring
we would find more satisfaction
Than the animus of war

los angeles bombed!
light casualty lists
only newspapers and radio stations hit
but the city s in turmoil
people dont have anyone left
to tell them how to think

they re fighting mad
(that s a good way to put it
fighting mad!)
(noone in their right mind would fight for a dog)ma
that s funny

coffins are too
as long as they re in cairo gaza budapest
funnyfunnyfunny shit
the streets of heaven are paved with s & h green stamps
that s what
and on into the night murder falling like rain
and not like rain
notsoft nothard
but finally

and voltaire was right
about the man burned at the stake
for not believing in griffins
o yes

while death creeps in nuzzling the feet
licking
of the church
begging crumbs from the slaughtered feast
sly and succinct like classified advertizing
while blood drips notsoslowly from the altar
pagan spired steeped in addletry/conformity/mythology
and all that other jazz
like jesus the christ and collection plates passed
by men dressed correctly to war-ship sundays
and wed-night meetings
steeped in the sense of death/blood on their hands in their minds

if i said do not kill, would you listen
or must i
in your ignorance, kill you
dont bolt dont revolt
listen to the wind whining in the trees
someday i would like to meet a human being
who did not want to die

So Soon Have They Forgotten

HARLAND RISTAU

(really an elegy for down-trodden civilians
who were deprived of an opportunity to go
for an airing with their bayonettes.)

we have come through fire days
fallen in new rain, mud-lived revellers
concomitant with steel, helmet, tank-
forgotten words...
we have come through stares drenched in sorrow,
laughter,
through pain of having fallen, fallen not bullet-sentenced,
but blinded in the noon light of a civilian tomorrow,
a tomorrow here already. so we have come,
so we have returned in a puppet parade
where tank, helmet, steel are paper myths
to buoy the senility of grasping minds.
so something is over,
so something for some lies stale
left-over days are all to be eaten, re-eaten
and eaten until silver handcuffs of routine
shackle imagination: something is over for all.
yet for a lonely some
better the bloated corpse, better the hollow hour
of fire, better the battering jangle of adventure.....
so soon have they forgotten.

Rendezvous

Harland Ristau

somehow they stroked heavy mane grasses
in boot-cleaving strides, forgetting the burden
of baggage on backs and conscience, forgetting
autumn shaved down to November.

in the last hour they drove an insensitive pathway
while silver reflected florid faces
of tiredness; their smiles of razor ease met
only the final impervious sand of the shore.

they paused, night sunk violet
blotting the high shag of elms; they paused, and darkness
teased the little warmth out of them; hard on the waves
searchlights struck cold signals of departure.

somehow they bent eyes backward from the barges,
veered past perversities, time and man, returning
to hills flanking autumn fields, where colors smothered
their footsteps, and a leaf found a quiet grave.

From Higher Ground

Harland Ristau

from higher ground
we have seen lives crawling,
searching for evacuated forms of smoke
in fields mud-flowered:

from higher ground
permanence of impermanence
lives a theatre in the mind.
below, they are coming,
from higher ground
we are threatening mist
imagiing steel and blood in wonder,
worked hard in nameless fear;
lips burst and silence,
while colossal insecurity
stabs the flesh dawn
where light dies in a day
storming night from the monument
of collapsing hope.

Cemetery

HARLAND RISTAU

war's percussive hiss—python strangling faun
humanity—war's sensual lust slides
belly-mudded, wearing thin
the skin of soldier feelings,
tearing limp his weary
rags of thinking;
and
killing's stark concussion bruises light to dark
horizon's; death broods dust-men,
covering warmed-up flesh, bearing
burdens of crosses. . . crosses clean
multiple, harsh, standing a forgotten
loneliness in tired
winds.

Korea

Harland Ristau

where one meets the other,
where the head would smother in pillowed
white nights of steel,
here in a vast tract
of blood unmeasured land
something is given birth
in protracted
shelvings of fire.

where one dies, the other, crawling
mist-bound, found against a banked up
shore loneliness, lives bandaged
trench solitudes, sailing
raftward dreams of home,
mud-caked, listening
to window nights
shattered in lamps of saffron moments.

where one meets the other (East and West,
Brothers in time, timelessly staring)
the sun washings streak horizons in scratches
of light; there, one, a khaki silence,
whose sentence rifle shall no longer
write flesh tunnel communication rifle words,
leans in corpse cries of wordless mouth, born in
sagging mists in the ebb of shadow-stoned humanity!

The Ammunition Truck

Harland Ristau

partitions flew forth silver
saffron bursts,
and the
lone
driver, a prisoner glass fronted,
eyed
his helplessness to me
in a stare of sudden
swimming;
transforming
my helmet image to a visionary mother,
as if my arms might still his child's novelty
of fear
and my voice comfort
and make well what was lost in quick pain.
but
in another shadow's dying,
twisted
in the unending wreck,
I saw the sod
breath scarlet,
and a cry ladder a voice to God!

Conversazione

James Boyer May

And when, *how* has one waxed Proustian enough—
and when posing ease, yet unrelaxed in chat,
so as fudgingly to lounge there granting mal-
iced untelling false insights of one's pet
mis-belaborings of trite-phrased judgments: on
letters ... on talents ... on politics ...
surely, on factors of inter-exchanges of
confabulations of potentates ...
all of what rotates on levels of precedence—
puissancies (memorable, although not from
giftedness) splash-loading blackfaced bold
stop-press dispatches for mad hives of
rumor for any bald-factioned prestige.

Such are first honors, self-governed by cultured
connivings to flatter one's ego while doing's
been niggardly favored by notice; such squander
of wisdoms untried, lackadaisical, prodigal-
wordy, self-satiate sallies of fatuous
tootlings of soured-soon offbeats, to rattle
whomever may presently happen in odd con-
tradiction to entertain visions of tableland's
prospect for valid-served tongue with such sauce.

Interspersed nibblings of chocolate
bits ... with wisped hints, in taut smoking, of
altars for meaningful phalli perhaps under
cover of bold-sexed remarks on tricked outlying
fringes of gab anent travel where motives are
plainer. And afternoon sun leaves red

terrace, with sighs on forbidden expressions of
final-coursed dalliance; these cannot
venture their bodies—not now! for their
Culture has clog-stopped all virtuous
lusts. As they utter no pictures of
urgencies either—so neither can
any form valid assumptions of
arts nor creative essayings—outside these, like
music beyond. All spiced portions consumed, they lack
taste-buds to rouse them anew, merely
babblings what-HAS-been, unblended in
prospect's significant flavors for motion to
else, whether sex-engined, intellect-powered or
forced on by subconscious recoil to loss.
Not even minnesinger poets here ...
but each and every sits a judge
of every which of those who've made
more grist from samer scenes
than any lived by journeyings
how far by educations, worm-
won,and with stealthy care there sewn,
to robe them all for choice
and deftly-padded benches.

... And thus,without preamble, stateth:
Herodotus foretold THE PRINCE ...
there was no stopping Stalin, Genghis Khan
prefiguring that ... and as for Israel,
a Moslem plan can heat that flame, and no
world war ensue ... because the aims are same,
materially, in vaster states which vow
no gods, but only furnish ammunish
for those who rant that HE has lived in universe
or monad. Yet, no seer, no poet-novelist
has writ the scientific script,
which scientists alone can do.
They are prime poets of today—
these dedicated students of rose graphs,
these laboratory wizards with their torch-

hot vials—words are obsolete! And what
man labors phraes is a fool,
when mathematics is the language thence.
No tender adjective can dress
strong formulae for guiding H- bomb missiles.
And finally, a quizz-game: *Who*
amongst today's interpreters of dreams
by sun can moon them well enough
to soothe the men who have bad answers...*how*
may anyone befoozle wittily
and give them sleep who feel the prick of time
they try to calm themselves with citing as
eternal (not by Providence, but physics) ... *when*
shall multiply sufficiently the books
of him who's capable of dealing with
this NIGHTMARE shared and furtively revealed
as common to these ponder-wits who glow
then, falsely seeking reassurances
which never light up theirs, because
THEY KNOW TOO MUCH!

Carrier Pigeons

SEYMOUR GRESSER

Who craves my offering
in singed flesh or incense mist

who holds the gift of severance
to end my days
takes harvest of memory
remnant to my name.

Though broken as a tulip
snapped by a clumsy foot of wind,
what have I to say
who hold the shears and threaten
arms of my timepiece with eternal life
and numerals semaphored with phosphorus
so at night too
the curious relic without voice
will stand its patriarch
enigma for my sons
and pose its questions to the sphinx
of their indifferent quests.

Let me stand desolate
to the chaff of angels and slantfall
of celestial baits; the blossoms brim
their odors as I crouch
in the fracture of my will;
my darkness barters its light
to revive illuminations
which flew their firefly yellow
through the evenings.

Let the rage of decay
dig for my soul
through endless layers of bones
and divisions of man;
for I have dwelled this day
in the unlocked flesh of my woman
who takes my destiny with infinite care
and binding without ritual my invisible body,
sends it aloft a healed blue bird
with white linened messaged feet
toward saltbathed voices
calling in the wind.

(XXVII. Carrier Pigeons from An Offering of Psalms)

Evening Comes

Seymour Gresser

The patients on the tables
are not etherized
though time goes by with cries of anonymous flesh
and some is struck
like summer moths pressed
in the crevices of windows
and the paste of thick shields
slides from waiting faces
and the surprise flesh really feels
burst down the truth-partitions
making one room standard for rooms
whose taste is pure and hate whose truth?

Whose face prides an ugliness
to what this world has been?
O they are not voiceless
when the song sung is their own;—
they are not narcotics of behaviours
mourning silent halls
who turn from the so-subtle mirror
of self love and confess
all glass is fragment of the beautiful
else how shall I face you
my beloved to ask
how were things today.

A Composition for Morning

Robert Vaughan

A composition for morning
made in old wire

because you can bend it
to fit your head,

a coming to the form
of the morning's chaos

because you can crush it
to suit your enclosure,

a twist like the day
of the law of the geometry

because it is right
until it is wrong,

and because fourteen lines make
a sonnet, we'll add two more to

a composition for morning
made in old wire.

Drifts

Eric Cashen

We would ride on our bicycles through the town after swimming. We wobbled from side to side, our clean shirts strapped on the rear, backs bare in the blistering sun. You had the hill up from Nobska Beach, which gentled off past the rich peoples' houses, fancy and flowery in the sun. Then the left turn by the golf course, serious road of black tar where one watched the white line scrupulously. Pedal, pedal, left foot, right foot, taking the little hillocks sitting down as if you were mounted on a motorcycle. And then the long coast down across the bridge to the harbor front and the train. I stopped there with Ean to listen as the freight pulled out. It chug-chugged up the track and under the bridge. David went whistling merrily by, dodging in and out between the stopped cars and waving us onward. It was follow the leader through the labyrinth of streets, some almost cow-paths, that led around to the beach again. And then we were back at the top of the hill, coasting downwards at tremendous speed and braking in the sand in front of the beach houses.

David was bronze and tan, Ean ivory. They raced to the water, splashing out into the waves. I felt the sun prickling between my shoulders. I took my shirt off the bike and put it on. I walked over to the beach and lay down. They were wrestling in the sand beside me. Dark skin against white, they struggled like two behemoths in a jungle of light. I watched eagerly. David was winning. His hand pressed on Ean's back as if he was moulding him. Ean gave in. The fight was over. I lay back and tried not to look at David any more. "You want some? You want some?" He jumped on me and pinioned me. I laughed helplessly. My shirt was open and it itched against my skin. He jumped off. "Let's get the bikes. It's almost time for lunch." Ean leaned over me.

"Want a hand?"

"Yes."

He reached out his and I took it. I was on my feet in an instant. "Let's go," he said.

Mrs. Clult's boarding house stood out from the edge of the village. We rode our bicycles up to the screen door and dismounted. "Wash your hands, kids." We were around back in an instant, scrubbing the grime off our hands and hosing the sand from between our toes. She had the best jello for dessert. She whipped it like cream. After lunch we rested on the steps and played battleships. I was the convoy and Ean was my escort. We were Germans. David was the United States Navy. When we had lost, Ean leaned back in the shade and crossed his arms under his head. "After rest, let's go down to Sam Calhoun's" he suggested. This was a new idea. On most afternoons we played pinball down at the drug store. "Let's play pinball," I said.

"Come on, then." David stood up. He looked down at us. His eyes were blue, and he seemed taller than before. I was only his cousin; Ean was his friend.

"Let's go to Sam Calhoun's," he said. We got up and followed him down to the bikes.

Sam Calhoun's fish market was adrift right in the middle of the wharf district. We entered through a large barn-like door and from there on we let our eyes follow their own bent. Fish swam behind dirty glass, their bodies silver in the white of the water, only their eyes were dead. These beaded, blue and cold, and luminescent, as they stared out at you from behind the glass cages. Fish have no eyelids. I walked along behind Ean and David, trying not to let the fish look at me, and keeping my eyes on the sawdust floor. We came next to the lobster bins. These were frightening monsters in all hues ranging from black to red to grey. They crawled over one another, mercilessly, heedless as to where they set down their claws. Often they would fight. I looked up and saw the big man I took to be Mr. Calhoun lifting a lobster out of the bin and showing it to a customer on our right. The stench in the place was awful. I felt sick. David nudged Ean and Ean pulled me over to the barrels in which they kept the quahogs like black coins in the briny water. I could look at them for hours. One of Sam Calhoun's helpers shouted out something. Another fishing boat had come in. We went outside towatch it moor and unload.

If you ever just sat in the harborway and tried to count the masts, you would soon be discouraged. There were any number, sort, and size. It was fun to try to bring a mast down to its boat, and you could

match the hulls for different sizes. They swayed heavily in the oily water. It had the color of mud here; not of fish eyes. "Come on, we've seen enough." David began to walk back along the street toward the entrance way. We followed him.

That evening, after a game of ball out in the street, we had supper at Ean's house. His mother had made hamburgers on the kitchen grill and gave them to us in big buns with plenty of relish. She was a dark, ungainly woman, pretty in an odd, serious way. Her husband and David's father were scientists together at the institute. They were going to a dinner party. She kissed Ean goodnight and left. It was then he started talking. "She's the most awful woman I ever knew. She bullies my father until he's blue in the face. One day she whipped me."

"You're lying," David said. Ean got very pale. "I am not lying! If you talk that way I won't give you any ice cream." David got up. He pinched Ean very hard on the arm, and walked over to the door. "Who cares!"

Ean just sat on the floor looking straight ahead. "I'm not lying," he repeated. Tears welled up in his eyes.

"Tattletale!" David said. He went out the door. A tear ran down Ean's nose. He dried it with his napkin, and swallowed hastily. "Do you want some ice cream?" he asked me.

"Yes, but I've got to go. I don't know the way and..."

Ean looked up. "I'll ride you home," he said.

"Well, sure, but he's my cousin. I've got to go now."

Ean stared at the floor.

It was cool outside. I could see David's tail light halfway up the street. I jumped on my bike and pedalled after him. When I caught up, he said, "Let's go downtown and play pinball."

"Okay," I said. We turned onto the main road.

Charmed Life

Emilie Glen

Sirens in the street, a fallout from sirens of the inner ear, forever alarming her to Niles. Hospital air medicated the phone booth. Breathed so much of it, her nostrils permanently tinctured, the caduceus set in the linoleum of the entrance hall, serpents she was always wrestling.

"It's Niles, he's been hurt. Can you come?"...dry mouthed over and over..."may not live... he's one the critical list...his shoulder broken, ribs, both ankles...you know that staircase in his hotel down on 19th street, the low, flimsy railings for anyone as tall as my brother ...he never waits for the decrepit elevator...fell five flights...he can go months without drinking, you know that...too far gone to try to save himself or he wouldn't be here, that and the plaster setback that broke his fall...even so, a wonder he's still alive..." Always a wonder, the way Niles crossed streets, his long bones in skeleton dance from between parked cars. Poor coordination as a child...shot up too fast, Mama used to say...trying to scramble out from under his height ever since. His ovaled fingers suggested a performer but, too impatient to practise his violin long hours interpreting somebody else's meaning, he had turned to composition.

"...know why I left him?" his first wife wanned the wires..."life with him is one emergency after another. I'm not rising to one more crisis..."

"Put Julie on...she'll come...of course her final exams are important ...but he's her father...he may not live..."

Howard pushed open the door to the entrance hall. Her older brother's very presence a strength...breadth rather than Niles' precarious height,a reassuring ruddiness, like father, as much as she could remember of him...face in juts something like her own but better looking in a man. The fine modeling went to Niles, a bit of it

to the youngest brother. If he hadn't been killed in the war he'd be alongside Howard now, the two of them had always been together in getting Niles out of jams.

"Howard — Howard, you're such a welcome sight."

"What is it, this time? I can't keep flying in from Detroit every time he—"

"Howard, it's serious, he's still on the critical list. He should be moved to a private room, but they're stalling until they're sure we can pay. That's how it is when you're picked up by an ambulance and put in a city hospital ward."

"All manufacturers aren't rolling in wealth, you know. Mine is a specialized line. Profits are uneven. I can't even meet my—"

"You're not answering to a revenue agent. We're all Niles has—"

"With the money he goes through, he keeps you poor on your grade teacher's pay. Why private? Semi private has always been good enough for my family—for his second wife before she died—"

"But this may be all we can ever do for him. With Mildred gone, he needs us more than ever. You know his musician's ear—every noise unnerves him like chalk on a screeking blackboard to us. And when— when he does get better, he'll want his friends around him. We can stay as long as he needs—"

"All right— all right. I'll foot the bill. Don't I always?"

While Howard arranged for a private room, she should be making more phone calls. Beth must be told, he was likely to marry Beth. Black instrument in gold gleams from the lobby lights, she couldn't lift her arm to it one more time, say, *Niles has been badly hurt.* Her eyes ached for sleep, but the lids were stretched tight.

Julie ran across the lobby to her in a chattering of petticoats. How could anybody look that clear skinned young? Shouldn't have called her, put her under the sign of the phone and the siren. Still underneath the puffs of gayety she wore like her fashion petticoats, a nurturing quality. Not ledger minded like her mother, counting up so much give to so much take. She had kept her office job the exact five years she considered the limit of time to prove himself, and when he lost out on the Freilinger award, closed out her account.

"Daddy, how is he? What can I do for him?"...daughter of his first wife, brown eyed earnest like his second, her father's modeling on an even finer scale.

"Aunt Edith, you look exhausted. You've been up all night, haven't

you? You must rest. I'll look after things."

"No— no, he needs me in a thousand and one ways"...thousand and one nights...worst, the student time he was mugged, left bludgeoned in Central Park...and in his coming to, instead of the usual worry over glasses lost or broken, all he cared about was the derby she had given him for Christmas...What had happened to his derby?

Niles cried his pain as they neared the door, Julie shouldn't be hearing her father suffer like this, she pressed the child's head to her shoulder.

Pain wrenched his words, but he held out a long fingered hand to their coming. Sometimes she thought his greatest talent was for people, charming mostly through being charmed by them.

"Where's Beth? Kevin? You phoned them, didn't you? And the Clarkson's, the Richards, Dr. Evans"...words broken off by pain, his hand in such desperate grip she had to keep from crying our herself.

How much more could he bear before he— She ran down the corridor to the nurse. "Can't you do something? He's in agony."

"As we've explained, Miss Dawson, there's so much alcohol in his system, no drug will take."

"You think he might become an addict, that's why you're denying him drugs."

"Not at all. We've tried—"

"Surely with today's medical science, you should be able to do something. How long can this go on?"

Hours, days of waiting, trying to teach her third graders and be with him at night, be always there for his nightmare, wakemare, he called it, when he would start up in a terror sweat that could injure bones trying to knit.

"Of a sudden the bed beneath me begins to lift— lifts straight up. I slide, fall, try to save myself, but I can't catch hold, I—"

"It's all right— all right. You can't fall again. You're here— here with me." Only the one free hand could stand reassuring pressure.

The moment he could have friends around she saw that he had a roomful at all hours, he couldn't get enough of their attentions. Dr. Evans, his brown white hair in natural tonsure, came for the usual wrestle with his soul. Niles never tires of playing *Hound of Heaven*.

Kevin brought his scores, his music paper. "Kevin— Kevin, how good of you to drop everything and come. He depends on you." She helped him carry the scores. "You're the one who can start him com-

posing again. You know how it's been since he lost Mildred."

From Juilliard days, Kevin as a nimble arranger, had helped Niles with the details of scoring his compositions. Niles too impatient to ground himself in theory and harmony, or take the regular curriculum.

Just how talented was Niles? His second wife had believed in him enough to go out and make a living for them. His aunt had subsidized him, Howard had helped, but he went through more money than they could raise as a family. Still you couldn't expect him to have a sense of money values when his were of tone and timbre. But how talented? Not a musical family. If you couldn't carry a tune yourself, how could you judge? The compositions his friends had played over for her, could impress unpractised ears—that is, in this prickly pear modern way. Often his creation went to conversation. And didn't musicians have a way of marrying musicians? Any other relationship deaf mute.

"A ship's cabin," Niles called his quarters, with everyone seeing him off, if only to the x-ray room," but I fooled you this time, no outward voyage."

Friends brought him records, books, meals in thermo bags to take the place of city hospital food, fed him when his shoulder pained him, and the nurses were too busy to bother.

He came out of the hospital in better shape than he had been in for years, and scared just enough to cross a sober street. Heedless at times. he did have an acute caution. Corbin, physically brave; Howard, the moral courage. As Niles put it, he was caught between a couple of strong brothers.

This the beginning. They drank to it— with lemonade. The alcohol had left his bloodstream. He ate better, slept better. She would come upon him at his music paper. Mama's often words, *Niles is indestructible, he leads a charmed life.*

During his convalescence he needed everyone more than ever, a difficult business of salves and bandages, massage, infra red lamps, everything to improve muscle tone, and more difficult, spirit tone. His friends formed a ring of strength around him, took turns watching in the night, against sleeplessness, against wakemares, screaming terror at the bed lifting straight up, hurtling him to another fall.

Kevin roused Niles to try for the Goncourt award, the winner's composition to be played by the Boston Symphony; worked with him

or the orchestration. From what she heard, his was as good as any modern music she had heard —just as hard to understand. This could be it— the great work. Julie thinks so, his success all she works at.

His *Variations* not quite ready to enter for the Goncourt prize, the first year. Before he could enter it the second year, he scrapped it for a work he and Kevin were even more excited about which required such specialized instruments that it never did get past his inner ear.

The third year, he and Kevin reworked the *Variations* until Kevin said it would never be readier. Like his time-limit first wife, Beth made a test of this, a last chance.

The week he was to enter his score, Beth phoned late one evening... "Do you know where Niles is? He didn't come home last night...no overcoat, this raw night, and you know how susceptible he is to chest colds..."

Phone, siren...again the dread. They searched the bars, winced at street crowds, afraid to look, not to look.

About to phone the hospitals when Julie found him fogging along Central Park mall among the sculptured greats...unsteady, not in alcohol but a feverish daze.

Another consuming crisis...pneumonia. Beth had her baby in this Niles-centered confusion.

With a child to look after, Beth couldn't watch over Niles. Up to Julie, Kevin, and herself. Poor Niles, Kevin tried to get his *Variations* some sort of hearing by adapting them to a ballet that was performed at a summer dance festival, but the composer was passed over in reviews concerned with choreographer and dancers.

Nine more years of it. Niles drinking, wandering off, not much trying to compose anymore. Poor Niles, so many losses. Dr. Evans had died. After her nervous breakdown Julie's mother had taken her to the West coast to live. Kevin not much help these days, he had given so much time to her brother's scores that his own work had suffered. Finances never worse, and Howard with too many business setbacks to help...in Florida for his health right now...and she, herself, only a slight stroke, but still...

Niles wrapped himself into the night sounds, hospital sounds, the whispered watch, soft footfalls like the brush of catkins, felt the smooth plastic oval by his pillow, bell to all needs.

City that takes no sedative . . this time not so much alcohol in him that drugs wouldn't work. pain something he ought to be feeling,

but couldn't quite...pain lost off in cushioning waters...strength sounds in the night...distant pile drivers...casting in far firey furnaces ...sirens rushing to someone's aid...river boats in all keys...sinking into the waters, the warm sleep waters...

Morning...hospital dawn...the sky like organ tones...Cesar Franck in his organ loft...disgusting sounds of the ward, he was still in the ward...the groans, the retching...icy bed pan raised goose flesh...they should warm them...the nurse whine-voiced as a patient.

"When are you moving me to a private room?"

"A private room? I don't know anything about that."

"Call the desk. You'll find my sister has made all arrangements, that is, if you notified her as you should. You did notify her, didn't you?"

"City cases are handled by the police, they do the notifying. Now you lie back. Your sister will be along, visiting hours."

"Visiting hours, she never waits for visiting hours. Just call the desk, you'll find all arrangements have been made"...*all arrangements* scarfed him from pain, his sister's brown wool scarf...drowse, warm brown drowse...

Started up to blackness...no one...couldn't cry out...no one would hear if he could cry out...no one...

The ward began to take sound and shape from this nightmare... worse than the lifting bed, the fall...no one...black space...no one...

The sun still morning...sunny sound of hammering...traffic a rubber ring, a huge floating tire. He signaled the nurse across the room.

"Did you call the desk? When are you moving me to my private room?"

"Only place you're going right now is the x-ray department to have your picture taken."

They lifted him into a wheelchair for a dizzy scherzo down the corridors. New nurses, new doctors, the same old elevator man, his head sunk below his shoulders.

"Nurse, can you stop off at a phone? I've got to call my sister. I don't think our overworked police force ever got around to notifying her."

"No, not possibly"...no...no...hostitals, nobitals.

Phone on the Doctor's desk a blackberry glisten..."Could I? Just one phone call. It will do even more good than all your excellent medicines."

"Well, make it brief."

The phone ringing in emptiness...the new doctor tapping off the time ..."Yes?"... strange voice... "Miss Dawson, please" ... "Miss Dawson can't come to the phone, I'm her nurse, may I take a message"... "Her nurse... What's wrong? ...A stroke?...I know, but that was some time ago"... I'm her brother... Why don't they move me into a private room?... Hasn't anyone phoned?"

"...They phoned all right at four in the morning...that's what brought on this second severe stroke... Well, she insists... don't keep her... she's not..."

"...Niles... Can you hear me, Niles?" ...his sister's voice a falling away, a cliff turned sand..."those thickhead police calling you at that hour... enough to give you a setback, but Edith, can't you do something?... get me out of this ward?... It's hideous, you can't know... I'll die without a phone within reach... calling from the Doctor's office... down here for x-ray... my skull might be fractured ...after all these years, a car... I need my record player, my scores ...the old crowd in my little ship's cabin...Where are you? Where is everybody?"

CONTRIBUTORS

Curtis Zahn lives in Malibu, California. This is his first appearance in NEON. The **hennypenny** press has recently brought out **Carl Larsen's** first book, "Notes from a Machine Shop." **David Galler** has appeared in NEON before. He lives in New York and has been widely and deservedly published. **Paul Goodman** continues to write with vigor and clarity. A New Yorker, he has written of that city with brilliance in **The Grand Piano** and **The Dead of Spring.** **James M. Singer** is the editor of the new West Coast magazine, **Emergent.** **Harland Ristau** lives in Milwaukee and appears in NEON for the first time. **James Boyer May**, the editor of the little magazines' directory, **Trace**, has appeared in many little magazines. **Stuart Z. Perkoff** lives in California. **Seymour Gresser** will soon bring out his first collection of poems. A painter as well as a poet **Robert Vaughan** lives in Texas. **Eric Cashen** makes his initial appearance in NEON. **Emilie Glen's** work has appeared in **Existaria** and other little magazines.

ITEMS

The Edge, an Australian magazine which is trying to lance the gloom with a little light, is published monthly by **Noel Stock.** Write Noel Stock, 436 Nepean Highway, Brighton, Melbourne, Australia, for information. Recent contributors have included Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams.

Basil Bunting's Poems (the only collection) are still available in the Square Dollar Series; Box 552 G.P.O. New York, N.Y.

Wyndham Lewis died on March 8th of this year. One of the most brilliant minds of our time, his ability to cuff the spurious and expunge the rot will be missed.

The finest book on the master, **Hugh Kenner's** "Dublin's Joyce" will repay and study given it. It is published by Indiana University Press.

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